Exorcism and Prayers for Deliverance: The Position of the Catholic Church

A Historical Review of Developments since the late 19th Century

and a Summary of the Norms now Applicable

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Version 2.0 – 28th June 2016

Online text with active links: **www.garethleyshon.info/Deliverance-X.pdf**

Abstract

The Catholic Church has carefully defined and restricted the ministry of *exorcising the possessed* for many centuries. There is also an ancient tradition of those not ordained priest pronouncing *minor exorcisms* over adults and children preparing for baptism. Yet the tradition and teaching documents of the Church barely acknowledge the possibility of an evil spirit afflicting a person in a manner which falls short of the criteria for possession.

In the absence of authoritative Church guidance, and following the example of Pentecostal Churches, there has been unrestricted experimentation by Catholics, particularly within the various expressions of Catholic Charismatic Renewal from 1967 to the present day, in the 'ministry of deliverance' which seeks to bring relief to those afflicted by demonic spirits.

This document seeks to achieve three things:

1) **An exhaustive review of all official pronouncements by the Magisterium concerning minor exorcism, major exorcism, and deliverance, from the start of the 20th Century to the present day.**

2) **A summary of the norms currently applicable to the ministry of deliverance, where these are explicitly stated or can be reasonably inferred from the documents identified above.**

3) **A brief survey of key authors giving pastoral guidance or resources for prayer in the light of what is established above. The key authors are: Cardinal Suenens; Bishop Julian Porteous; Revd Gabriele Amorth; the ICCRS doctrinal commission.**

Index

Abstract 2

Index 2

Purpose and Definitions 4

Kinds of Demonic Influence 4

Kinds of Ministry 5

A Review of Formal Church Documents 6

1) The *Status Quo* in 1913 6

2) The 1917 Code of Canon Law 6

3) The Pre-Vatican II Roman Ritual 7

4) The Suppression of the Minor Order of Exorcist 8

5) Minor Exorcism before the Baptism of Infants 8

6) Minor Exorcisms before Baptism for Adults 9

7) The CDF Study on Demonology 10
8) The 1983 Code of Canon Law 11
9) Cardinal Ratzinger's Letter to Bishops in 1985 11
10) The Catechism of the Catholic Church 11
11) The 1999 Rite of Exorcism 12
12) The Instruction on Prayers for Healing 14
13) Summorum Pontificum 14
The Rules which Currently Apply 15
Major Exorcisms 15
Minor Exorcisms 15
Sacramentals 15
Places and Things 15
Prayer in Private 16
Implications for Deliverance Ministry 17
The Ordinary Form 17
The Extraordinary Form 17
Minor Exorcisms 17
Exorcisms, not otherwise specified 18
Lay-led activities 18
Sources of Pastoral Guidance 20
Cardinal Suenens – Renewal and the Powers of Darkness 20
Bishop Julian Porteous – The Manual of Minor Exorcisms 21
Revd Gabriele Amorth – An Exorcist: More Stories 23
ICCRS Guidelines on Healing 24
About the Author 25

Purpose and Definitions

The existence of Satan ("the Devil") and other malevolent spirits (demons, "fallen angels") is an integral part of the teaching of the Catholic Church: paragraph 391 (LT IT SP) of the *Catechism* quotes the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council in this regard.

This document is written as a review and summary of the official teachings of the Catholic Church on dealing with these spirits.

In order to write consistently and clearly, we must first define certain technical terms. The international nature of the Catholic Church complicates this. Some formal teaching documents are issued in Latin. Often Italian is used, since the central administration of the Catholic Church is in Rome. I am writing for the English-speaking world, with the possibility that some of this work may be translated into Spanish. For this reason, whenever I quote official church documents, I will give a main reference to English, where available, but also reference to Latin, Italian and Spanish versions of texts by applying hyperlinks as exemplified above: (LT IT SP)

One particular translation issue must be kept clearly in mind: the term *obsession* used by English-speaking practitioners ***does not*** correspond to the Latin *obsessis* (Italian *ossessa*, Spanish *obsesa*) which is normally rendered into English as **possessed**.

Kinds of Demonic Influence

English-speaking practitioners generally use the four following terms to refer to the influence of evil spirits:

Oppression – demonic influence which seems to come from outside a person, causing heaviness, weariness or discouragement. Oppressive spirits may be acquired through exposure to a heavy presence of evil: *e.g.* by participating in deliverance ministry (defined below), by being in a place where occult activities are taking place, by being placed under a curse, by coming into contact with items of witchcraft. Oppressive spirits may be dispelled by a simple command to leave in the name of Jesus.

Obsession – demonic influence which seems to reside inside a person, usually afflicting a certain area of a person's life in the form of strong habitual temptations. A person may open oneself to such influce by deliberately seeking the presence or power of evil spirits through witchcraft, Satanism, or fortune-telling (ouija, tarot etc.); demonic obsession may also occur through other grave sins which are not explicitly associated with the occult, *e.g.* sexual activity by consecrated or ordained persons pledged to celibacy. The obsessing spirit usually needs to be identified by name and cast out (*i.e.* commanded to leave) or bound (*i.e.* forbidden from exerting any further influence).

Possession is very rare, and only occurs when human beings wilfully hand over complete control of their life to Satan, by expressly doing so or by embracing grave sin. Formal exorcism, sanctioned by the diocesan bishop, is always required in such cases.

Infestation is used to refer to the influence of evil spirits over objects, animals, houses or places. These can become infested by exposure to occult activity or by a deliberate curse being directed towards them.

Demonization may be used as a general term covering all the above situations.

Kinds of Ministry

The Church's rites of Baptism for Adults and Children include prayers called ***minor exorcisms,*** which are used during or before the ceremony of Baptism itself. These are automatically performed as part of the preparation for Christian baptism. There is no need for evidence that the catechumen (person preparing for baptism) is being specially afflicted by demons.

The rite which seeks to liberate a person who is possessed is called ***major exorcism***. In popular culture, unqualified reference to an *"exorcism"* invariably means this kind.

Among English-speaking practitioners, the term ***deliverance,*** a generic term for freeing someone from the influence of a demon, is applied specifically to cases of obsession and oppression of persons, and infestation of places.

The usual use of words is therefore one in which (major) exorcism is a specific ministry to persons who are possessed; deliverance is ministry to persons who may be oppressed or obsessed by evil spirits, or over places and things which may be infested. Contrary to common English usage, being "obsessed by evil spirits" here DOES NOT mean "narrowly and intently focussed on thinking about evil spirits".

When major exorcisms or other acts of deliverance are being carried out, two kinds of spoken formulae are used:

> A ***deprecative formula*** is a prayer which petitions God to liberate a person from the influence of an evil spirit.
>
> An ***imperative formula*** is a command addressed directly to an evil spirit.

An important reason to make this distinction is found in Scripture itself – see the Epistle of Jude, verse 9.

Any formal exorcism is normally authorised by the Diocesan Bishop. Legal church documents, however, often refer to the ***Ordinary***. Under most circumstances, this term refers to the diocesan bishop or his deputy (vicar general), but for members of certain religious orders or other special groups in the church (e.g. personal prelatures), and in territories where there is no diocesan bishop, it may indicate another church official. Most readers of this document can safely assume that the Ordinary under whose authority they fall is their local Diocesan Bishop.

A Review of Formal Church Documents

1) The *Status Quo* in 1913

We begin this review in the early 20th Century. At that time, and following a custom dating back to the early centuries of the Church, men preparing for priesthood were successively ordained to *minor orders* called porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte and then the major orders of subdeacon and deacon before finally being ordained priest. Those who had received the minor order of "exorcist" had authority to pray the minor exorcisms over catechumens preparing for baptism. Ministry to those believed to be *possessed*, however, was not entrusted to these exorcists, but only to priests, who followed the rite of *major exorcism* set down in the *Roman Ritual*. (Usually, depending on local rules, the priest would need the local Bishop's express permission.) The word "exorcism" was applied to three practices in the Church: not only the minor and major exorcisms just identified, but also to certain blessings over oil, salt and water.

All the hyperlinks in the paragraph above are to text from the 1913 Catholic Encyclopaedia *which offers an excellent window on how Catholic clergy were organised at that time. Much has changed in the following century!*

2) The 1917 Code of Canon Law

The year 1917 marked the first time in the Catholic Church's history that a large collection of its rules were published together in an authoritative compendium, now known as the Pio-Benedictine *Code of Canon Law*. Canons 1151-1153 (LT) treated of exorcism. In summary:

1151§1: To exorcise a possessed person, express authorisation from the Ordinary (local Bishop or equivalent) is required.

1151§2: This permission is only to be given to priests of the highest repute, and that priest must establish reasonable certainty that the person in need is truly possessed before proceeding.

1152: Exorcism is not restricted to Catholics in good standing and catechumens; if required, it may be also be applied to non-Catholics and to those excommunicated.

1153: The exorcisms associated with the catechumenate or with certain blessings may be carried out by the legitimate ministers. [This therefore affirmed the ministry of those in the minor order of "exorcist".]

3) The Pre-Vatican II Roman Ritual

The rites of exorcism are among the many blessings and ceremonies included in the collection called *The Roman Ritual*. The Latin text current in 1950, together with an unofficial English translation by Revd Philip T. Weller, was published by the Bruce Publishing Company of Milwaukee, and recently reissued in 2007 by *Preserving Christian Publications Inc.* of Boonville, New York. (A Latin-English PDF of the text can also be found online.)

This volume contains two ceremonies of exorcism. The first, labelled in English simply as "Rite of Exorcism" but in Latin as *Ritus Exorcizandi Obsessos a Deamonio* (Rite of Exorcising those Posessed by Demons), is only to be conducted by a priest who has been expressly instructed to do so by the Ordinary (local Bishop or equivalent). This is the rite to be performed for the liberation of a person who has been identified as 'posessed'. The translator consistently uses this word to translate the Latin *obsessis*. The rubrics warn the exorcist against needlessly questioning the evil spirit, but acknowledge the need to force the spirits to reveal their identity (see paragraphs 14 and 15 in the rite).

The second ceremony is entitled *Exorcismus in Satanam et Angelos Apostaticos* – "Exorcism against Satan and the fallen angels". A rubric indicates that this rite may be used by "priests who have this authorisation from their Ordinary". It consists of:

- A prayer to St Michael the Archangel (an expanded form of the familiar "Holy Michael...")
- A statement of purpose
- Extract from Psalm 67 and Response
- The act of exorcism which includes direct commands to the evil spirits: "Get thee out... begone..." as well as many indirect commands ("The Father commandeth thee...")
- A prayer to God for the protection of "us".

According to Revd Anthony Cekada, this second ceremony was inserted into the Roman Ritual following its promulgation in 1890:

> Leo XIII approved a new and lengthy "Exorcism against Satan and Apostate Angels," intended to be used by bishops and by priests who received special permission from their ordinaries. (See SCPF, *ex aud. SSmi.*, 18 May 1890, AAS 23 [1890–91], 747.) (LT P. 747)

> This rite employed the 1888 prayer to St. Michael… as sort of a preface to a series of prayers of exorcism. (See SCPF "Exorcismus…", AAS 23 [1890–91], 743–4.) (LT P. 743)

Therefore, for much of the 20th Century, the Roman Ritual contained two ceremonies: The *Major Exorcism* for use only by a priest-exorcist specifically mandated by his bishop to minister to a possessed person, and the *Exorcism against Satan and the Fallen Angels*, which was directed at the protection of a place or a group of people, which may be used by priests given this general permission by their local Ordinary.

4) The Suppression of the Minor Order of Exorcist

In 1972, Pope Paul VI issued a document known as *Ministeria Quaedam* (LT), which discontinued the ranks of porter, exorcist and subdeacon for those men preparing for priesthood. It retained lector and acolyte as "ministries" which could be conferred permanently on men (but not women) whether or not those men intended to be ordained deacon or priest.

The document explicitly encouraged the Bishops in different countries (through collective decisions in their Bishops' Conference) to consider whether the church in their nation needed the other ministries – explicitly including *exorcist* – and indicated that Rome would respond positively to requests to re-establish these locally, as "lay ministries" rather than minor orders.

5) Minor Exorcism before the Baptism of Infants

In 1969, an English translation was released of the *Rite of Baptism for Children* (later amended 1984). Baptism could be celebrated by a priest or deacon and included the following formula of minor exorcism prior to the anointing with the oil of catechumens:

> Almighty and ever-living God, you sent your only Son into the world
> to cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil,
> to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness,
> and bring him into the splendour of your kingdom of light.
> We pray for this child.
> Set him/her free from original sin.
> Make him/her a temple of your glory,
> and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him/her.
> We ask this through Christ our Lord.

This is a very indirect form of exorcism, merely a reminder that God has the power to banish Satan and therefore a nod to the Almighty that if banishing is needed on behalf of this child, it would be good for it to happen.

6) Minor Exorcisms before Baptism for Adults

The Second Vatican Council (*Sacrosanctam Concilium* #64 LT IT SP) called for adults seeking baptism to be part of a formal process of preparation, or catechumenate, as was the case in the early church. A *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* was therefore prepared after the Council, and an interim English edition published in 1974. A revised and expanded version for the USA was published in 1988. Paragraph references are to the USA edition with the cross-reference to the Latin original in [brackets].

The rite includes a selection of Minor Exorcisms 93A – 93K [113-118, 373.1-373.5], with a note that these may be conferred by priests, deacons, or by catechists deputed to do so by their Bishop 16 & 90-93 [48, 101, 109-112]. The prayers have been deliberately worded as petitions to God – they are ***deprecative formulations***.

For instance:

A: God of power... protect them from the spirit of evil...

B: Lord our God... in the power of the Holy Spirit we ask you to remove from these your servants all unbelief and hesitation in faith, (the worship of false gods and magic, witchcraft and dealings with the dead), the love of money and lawless passions, enmity and quarrelling, and every manner of evil.

C: God of power... save these your servants: keep them free from evil and the tyranny of the enemy.

D: Lord Jesus... protect them from the spirit of greed, of lust and of pride...

E: O God, watch over them... keep them in their providence.

F: Lord and God... increase their faith and accept their repentance

G: Lord Jesus... free them from the snares and malice of Satan...

H: Lord Jesus... do not let them remain ... enslaved by a spirit of unbelief...

I: Lord Jesus... after freeing the possessed, you gave us a sign of your mercy... hold in check the power of the evil one...

J: God... purify them, so that freed of all deception...

K Lord... purify their hearts...

Rather than reproduce the whole prayer texts here, I have excerpted from each prayer the phrase which contains the strongest petition against evil. There is quite a range – at the strongest end, formulae C, G and I pray against "the enemy", "Satan" and "the evil one" respectively, while formula A invokes protection against a more general "spirit of evil".

Texts D and H respectively seek protection from "the spirit of greed, of lust and of pride" and "a spirit of unbelief" while formula B, without mentioning "spirits" also targets unbelief, and can optionally include a prayer of protection from past idolatry, sorcery, witchcraft, mediumship and necromancy.

At the softer end of the spectrum, texts J and K simply invoke "purification of heart" while formulae E and F contain no mention of evil in any specific form, merely praying for God's general protection and assistance in spiritual growth.

Since anointing with the oil of catechumens may immediately follow these rites, and this may be repeated on several occasions, it helps clarify the sacramental meaning of this oil as an enacted prayer for protection against evil rather than an immediate preparation for an unrepeatable baptism. This is also spelled out in the rubrics: 98-101 [103, 127-129, 212].

Note that all the minor exorcisms identified above may be carried out by a lay catechist deputed for this purpose by the Bishop, though the use of the oil of catechumens is reserved to deacons and priests.

In addition to these exorcisms, the three Scrutinies, to be celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, each contain a prayer of exorcism reserved to the deacon or priest. The language employed by the First and Third Scrutiny formulae is stronger – e.g. "God of power... defend them from the power of Satan... Lord Jesus... rule over that spirit of evil" (First Scrutiny: 154A [164].) Nevertheless, all these formulae remain of the deprecatory form of petitions to God our Father or to our Lord Jesus Christ.

A simplified set of prayers is provided for children of catechetical age. The only minor exorcism is part of a simplified one-off Scrutiny which is offered in two forms: 300A & 300B [339 & 392] which both use the image of entering the light of Christ, turning respectively from "darkness" and from "whatever could make them bad".

The USA ritual book also contains additional prayers to be used with already-baptised Christians preparing to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church, including a one-off Scrutiny which may be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Lent. Although it notes (463) that a careful distinction must be made between the exorcisms of the elect and this penitential rite for baptised adults, one possible prayer over the candidates (470A) prays that the candidates may "be freed of ... obstacles and falsehoods" while the other (470B) prays that they may "resist all that is deceitful and harmful" and that Jesus would "heal the wounds of their sins".

7) The CDF Study on Demonology

In 1975, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a text (~~LT~~ FR IT SP) commissioned from a French-speaking expert who had been asked to summarise the Catholic Church's position on the existence of evil spirits. This represents the lowest form of the Vatican's teaching authority: an endorsed opinion. The text is often known by its Italian name, ***Fede Cristiana e Demonologia*** (*Christian Faith and Demonology*).

This text mainly concerned post-modern scepticism about the existence of Satan and other evil spirits. It considered, and rejected, Biblical interpretations of the New Testament which pre-suppose demons do not exist and then explain away accounts of Jesus casting them out. It notes how most of the early writers known as the "Church Fathers" acknowledged and wrote about the influence of evil spirits. It traces the history of why the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 affirmed the existence of evil spirits, in a text which was re-affirmed many times up to the First Vatican Council in 1870. It does not treat in detail of the ministry of deliverance or exorcism.

8) The 1983 Code of Canon Law

In 1983, a new Code of Canon Law was issued for the Western Church. It contained nothing new; in fact only one canon, 1172 (LT IT SP), mentions exorcism and it reiterates most of Canon 1151 from the earlier code. The precise and complete English text is as follows:

1172§1. No one can perform exorcisms legitimately upon the possessed unless he has obtained special and express permission from the local ordinary.

1172§2. The local ordinary is to give this permission only to a presbyter who has piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life.

The Latin text thus translated describes "exorcisms upon the possessed" using the words *exorcismos in obsesses*.

9) Cardinal Ratzinger's Letter to Bishops in 1985

In 1985, Cardinal Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote a short letter (LT IT SP) to Bishops. In summary, it says:

1. Bishops should ensure that only authorised exorcists perform exorcisms.
2. Laity should not use the prayer of exorcism contained within Leo XIII's "Exorcism against Satan and the fallen angels".
3. No-one except authorised exorcists may interrogate evil spirits, whether to ask them to reveal their identity, or to answer other questions.

10) The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was compiled in French and published in English in 1994, being slightly revised and finalised in 1997. Its main paragraph on Exorcism is 1673 (LT FR IT SP):

1673 When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism. Jesus performed exorcisms and from him the Church has received the power and office of exorcizing. In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of Baptism. The solemn exorcism, called "a major exorcism," can be performed only by a priest and with the permission of the bishop. The priest must proceed with prudence, strictly observing the rules established by the Church. Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to his Church. Illness, especially psychological illness, is a very different matter; treating this is the concern of medical science. Therefore, before an exorcism is performed, it is important to ascertain that one is dealing with the presence of the Evil One, and not an illness.

11) The 1999 Rite of Exorcism

The Second Vatican Council called for all Catholic rites to be revised. The revised rite of exorcism was not published until 1999. It was published, in Latin, by the Vatican Press (*Typis Vaticanis*) and re-issued in a revised edition in 2004. There is not currently an official English translation. The full Latin title is *De Exorcismis et Supplicationibus Quibusda* – Of Exorcisms and Certain Supplications.

The text of the rite is not available on-line, but the Vatican website does include a speech (IT SP) made by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, His Eminence Jorge Arturo Medina Estévez, on the occasion of the Presentation of the Rite. With help from Google Translate, we read:

> Sacred Scripture teaches us that evil spirits, enemies of God and of humanity, exert their effects in different ways; among these is reported demonic obsession [SP: *obsesión diabólica*; IT: *ossessione diabolica*] also called demonic possession [SP: *posesión diabólica*; IT: *possessione diabolica*]. But demonic possession is not the most common way in which the spirit of darkness exercises its influence.
>
> Possession is characterised by spectacular features in which the demon takes control, in a certain manner, of the strength and physical abilities of the person possessed. It cannot, however, take over the free will of the subject, so the demon cannot force the person possessed to choose to sin. Nevertheless, the physical violence which the demon enforces is an incentive to sin, and this is what it wants to achieve.
>
> The ritual of exorcism indicates various criteria and indications which allow you to reach, with prudent certainty, the conviction that demonic possession is indeed present. It is then that the duly mandated exorcist can perform the solemn rite of exorcism. Among these criteria are: speaking or understanding many words of unlearned languages; disclosing things at a distance or hidden; exerting strength beyond the possessed person's natural ability; and these together with vehement aversion to God, the Virgin Mary, the Saints, the cross and holy images.
>
> It is emphasized that to perform the exorcism, permission of the diocesan bishop is required. Authorization may be granted for a specific occasion; or a general and permanent appointment may be made designating a priest as a diocesan exorcist.
>
> In the Ritual we are presenting today will be found, first of all, the Rite of Exorcism itself – the rite to be performed on a person possessed. Next, there are the prayers to be recited publicly by a priest, with the permission of the Bishop, when it is judged prudently that there is some influence of Satan over places, objects or people, but not to the extent of full possession. There is also a collection of prayers which may be recited privately by the faithful, when they suspect evil influences may be present.

The text above is not a translation of the whole speech, but merely selected portions which help to define the nature of exorcism. The text also contains interesting comments about Satan's fundamental trait as being a Liar – in opposition to Christ, who is Truth – and the consequences of allowing children to believe that lying is an acceptable way to avoid trouble. It concludes with a reminder that exorcisms have their rightful place – but not pride of place – in humanity's fight against evil.

Now we turn from the introductory speech to the published rite itself. The 2004 edition contains the following sections:

Chapter One: *The Rite of Major Exorcism* (for use only by mandated priest-exorcists).

Chapter Two: *Various texts which may be used* ad lib *as part of the rite.*

Appendix One: *Prayers and exorcism for use in particular circumstances of the church.*

An introductory rubric states: The Devil and other demons can not only afflict persons (by temptation and vexation), but also places and objects, and can cause various forms of opposition and persecution of the Church. If the diocesan Bishop, in the particular circumstances, judges it opportune to announce meetings for the faithful to pray, under the guidance and direction of the priest, selected prayers and directives can be taken from the following pages.

Appendix One contains the following liturgy:

- A liturgical greeting.
- An optional liturgy of the Word – reading(s) and homily.
- A collect addressed to the Holy Spirit.
- Optionally, a prayer of the faithful concluding with the Lord's Prayer.
- A statement of purpose.
- An extract from Psalm 67 with congregational response.
- The act of exorcism, first in deprecative formula, then imperative.
- The *Sub tuum* prayer and an extended form of the St Michael Prayer.
- A sprinkling with holy water, blessing and dismissal.

Appendix Two: *Prayers which may be used privately by the faithful in the struggle against the powers of darkness.*

Appendix Two contains the following (all in Latin):

- Five "collect" style prayers to God.
- A short litany of invocations of the Holy Trinity.
- A long litany of invocations of Jesus.
- Short invocations to the Lord with the sign of the Cross.
- Invocations of the Blessed Virgin Mary, including the *Sub tuum* and *Memorare.*
- The well-known shorter *Holy Michael* prayer.
- A short litany of saints.

In the general instructions at the start of the rite, we find Paragraph 28, which sets out the circumstances in which the priest-exorcist may address the spirit(s) directly:

Finally he prays the deprecative formula, which petitions God, as well as an imperative formula, by which the devil, in the name of Christ, is directly adjured, to come out of the one possessed. The imperative formula should not be applied unless preceded by the deprecative formula. The deprecative formula may be used with the imperative formula.

12) The Instruction on Prayers for Healing

In the year 2000, the CDF issued an *Instruction on Prayers for Healing* (LT IT SP) which set out general principles for all kinds of healing services. It begins by making a distinction between liturgical and non-liturgical services; the former are more strictly regulated by the liturgical books and by the Diocesan Bishop.

Articles 5§2 and 7§1 require that a clear distinction be kept between liturgical and non-liturgical services. The former must always be celebrated following the liturgical books. Intercessions ***for*** the sick, but not ministry ***to*** the sick, may be included in the Prayer of the Faithful (7§2). It is specifically forbidden to carry out the Rite of Exorcism in any kind of healing service (8§2) or with Mass, the Divine Office, or the celebration of any sacrament (8§3).

13) Summorum Pontificum

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued *Summorum Pontificum* (LT IT SP), which gave wide permission for priests to use the 1962 Missal of St John XXIII. It also stated: ***Art. 9, §1 The parish priest, after careful consideration, can also grant permission to use the older ritual in the administration of the sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, Penance and Anointing of the Sick...***

Although the document did not give explicit permission to use the Roman Ritual for other rites, the accompanying letter to bishops (~~LT~~ IT SP) indicated that the old Missal had never been formally abrogated and therefore could have been legitimately used at any time. Since the Decree authorising the 1999 Rite of Exorcism only permits its use, without requiring the suppression of the previous text, by the same logic, the use of the previous text of the Roman Ritual remains legitimate. This applies both to the Rite of Exorcism and the various blessings of Holy Water, Salt and Oil which contain prayers of exorcism.

This raises an interesting question about the legitimate use of exorcised oil. A translation of the Extraordinary Form's blessing of oil, intended for use by the laity as a sacramental, can be found at #8. But a 1997 instruction (~~LT~~ IT SP) jointly issued by eight Vatican departments restricts the use of oil in ***any*** context of healing prayer to the priest-led Sacrament of Anointing the Sick alone.

The 1997 instruction is more recent, and expressly overrides "particular laws, customs and faculties" – but the oil as a sacramental permitted by the Extraordinary Form is part of the universal liturgy of the Church, and the 1997 text does *not* include the formula "anything to the contrary notwithstanding". Since canon law favours the most permissive reading of a complicated situation, it is arguable that the use of oil blessed according to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Ritual is therefore permitted.

Latin texts and English translations of the Extraordinary Form blessings can be found in the same volume of Weller as the Rite of Exorcism; the English text alone, in basic formatting, is available online. The relevant blessings will be found at **Part XI – Chapter II - 1 *Rite For Providing Holy Water*** (which includes the exorcism and blessing both of water and of salt), and **Chapter VIII - 8 *Blessing Of Oil*** which is grouped with the blessing of other foodstuffs, but (unlike the other foods) includes an exorcism over the oil and a specific prayer that those who use it may be protected from the Devil.

The Rules which Currently Apply

In the light of all the documents listed above, we can confidently say that the following rules apply:

Major Exorcisms

Major Exorcism only applies when there is sound evidence that a person is *possessed* (Latin *obsessis*, Italian *ossessa*, Spanish *obsesa*).

Only a priest specifically appointed by the Diocesan Bishop (as a general exorcist or to minister to a specific person) may carry out the Rite of Major Exorcism.

He may use Chapter 1 of the 1999 Rite, supplemented by prayers from Chapter 2 as he sees fit, or (following the implicit logic of *Summorum Pontificum*) may use the previous rite, *viz.* the *Ritus Exorcizandi Obsessos a Deamonio*.

Minor Exorcisms

The only minor exorcisms specifically published by the Church are those for children and adults preparing for baptism. These may be celebrated by deacons and priests, and also by catechists in dioceses where the bishop has specifically mandated them to do so. Clerics, but not lay catechists, may also use the Oil of Catechumens in the manner set down in the ritual books.

Sacramentals

Following the implicit logic of *Summorum Pontificum,* all priests in good standing have the ability to use the Extraordinary Form rites of blessing and exorcising salt, oil and water. These sacramentals may be given to the faithful for their own private use.

The medal of St Benedict is an important sacramental, the use of which expresses faith in Christ's protection from the Enemy. (The link, which gives both information and the text of an approved blessing, is to an official Benedictine website.)

Places and Things

Where there is prudent reason to believe that a place or a thing is under demonic influence, a priest may seek permission from the local Bishop to perform Appendix I of the1999 Rite. Alternatively, (following the implicit logic of *Summorum Pontificum*), if he has his bishop's general permission to make use of the *Exorcismus in Satanam et Angelos Apostaticos*, he may do so without needing to seek explicit permission for the particular case.

It should not be forgotten that simpler remedies – such as blessing the place with holy water (perhaps exorcised using the older Roman Ritual) – or celebrating Mass in the place – may have a powerful effect without needing to have recourse to the Rite of Exorcism. The inhabitants of a place may, of course, make free use of the Appendix II prayers privately.

Prayer in Private

Laity (and of course clergy too), within their own homes and families, may make free use of the prayers in Appendix II of the 1999 Rite.

Some of the prayers in Appendix II do not specifically request deliverance from evil, and therefore there is no reason these prayers cannot be said in public contexts.

The *Holy Michael* prayer, having been used in common by the faithful for more than half of the 20th century, cannot reasonably be expected to be restricted; indeed, St John Paul II called for its widespread recitation in 1994. (~~LT~~ IT SP)

But the other prayers in Appendix II, particularly the litanies with the refrain "deliver me/us", are those which are to be said "privately".

At what point does a prayerful gathering of laity, with or without clergy present, become public?

It would clearly be a public act to publish a poster, or an open invitation on the Internet, saying "We are gathering in such-and-such a place at this time and date to pray these prayers."

It would also be a public act to make use of the prayers from Appendix II without prior warning, at a prayer meeting which had been advertised on social media or to all the members of a parish.

It is arguable that personal invitation is not a public act, and so a closed group – e.g. the members of a confraternity, or a group of friends who mutually agreed to pray in this way – might legitimately gather to use the restricted prayers in Appendix II. It is a principle of Canon Law, #18 (LT IT SP), that restrictive laws must be interpreted as liberally as possible.

Under the terms of Cardinal Ratzinger's 1985 letter, the lay faithful (or indeed, a cleric who does not have the due authorisation from his bishop) may not recite the full text of the *Exorcismus in Satanam et Angelos Apostaticos*, nor the specific text of Exorcism contained within it. It does not seem that use of the other texts of that rite, *exclusive* of the act of exorcism itself, would be forbidden.

Be aware that versions of the *Exorcismus in Satanam et Angelos Apostaticos* text are present on the internet with a modification indicating a variant line for use when a lay person recites the text – see versions at Traditio, Tradition In Action and the Franciscan Archive. So far I have not been able to identify any official church publication which included that variant, though I have not yet been able to access all the relevant off-line sources. Lay use of these versions is explicitly forbidden under the terms of the 1985 letter.

Implications for Deliverance Ministry

Throughout all the Vatican documents traced above, there are very few explicit recognitions that demons can influence human beings in ways which fall short of full possession. The current and former Rites of Exorcism contain copious notes about how to diagnose whether a person is in fact possessed, but no directions about what to do in cases of lesser influence.

The Ordinary Form

The 1999 speech by Cardinal Medina Estévez does acknowledge that there are situations where Satan has some influence over people, but not to the extent of full possession – he introduces Appendix I of the Rite as for use where "places, objects **or persons**" [my emphasis] show influence short of full possession. Although the wording of the introductory rubric to Appendix I is ambiguous concerning whether this rite is to be applied to persons, the Cardinal's words leave no doubt that it may be so applied.

The whole text of Appendix I Paragraph 1 is ambiguous, in that it starts by asserting that demons can afflict "not only persons but also places and objects" and then says "the diocesan Bishop, in the particular circumstances, may judge it opportune to announce meetings for the faithful to pray". There are several ways of interpreting this text. Possibilities include:

- Appendix I may only ever by implemented when the Bishop judges it appropriate.
- A priest may pray this rite on his own without the Bishop's permission, but needs permission to gather people with him.
- A priest may pray this rite for a person who is demonized (short of possession), but needs the Bishop's permission to apply it to a place or thing.
- Any priest, by virtue of the chapter heading, may pray Appendix I with a congregation wherever the particular circumstances of the Church suggest it is appropriate; the rubric merely reminds the priest that if his Bishop intervenes and says that the situation warrants a public prayer meeting (perhaps having identified a demonic attack on the wider Church), he should select suitable prayers from the texts which follow.

What is clear in Appendix I is that these prayers are always to be led by a priest – the rubrics clearly indicate that the *sacerdote* speaks in all cases except the people's responses. Cardinal Medina Estévez's speech seems to indicate that the right interpretation is that a priest may pray Appendix I for a person, as well as a place or an object, with his bishop's permission – but it is left unclear whether the bishop must give case-by-case permission or can grant the priest a general faculty to make a prudent judgment about when to use the prayers.

The Extraordinary Form

Since the "Exorcism against Satan and the fallen angels" does not specify from where or from what the demons are being cast out, it is as applicable to a demonized person as to a place – but it is explicitly restricted for use only by those priests who have a general authorisation to do so.

Minor Exorcisms

The existence of the pre-baptismal minor exorcisms for adults indicate the Church's belief that exorcism can be beneficial for persons who do not show signs of possession, and that such exorcisms can be carried out by lay ministers.

Exorcisms, not otherwise specified

Article 1673 of the Catechism clearly identifies the word "exorcism" as applicable whenever "the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion. ... Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession." This might indicate a preference in the language of the Church for acts of deliverance in cases which fall short of possession to be labelled merely "exorcism" or perhaps "simple exorcism". The wording of the Catechism is broad enough to encompass cases of moderate seriousness which fall between minor exorcisms and major exorcisms. The precedent set by minor exorcisms indicates that exorcism in general, as opposed to major exorcism in particular, may be administered by a competent lay person.

Lay-led activities

Within Catholic Charismatic Renewal, situations may arise where a person who asks for help seems to be afflicted by an evil spirit. These situations may take place during prayer groups or ministry training workshops; quite often, there may be no priest present. The degree of affliction may seem to fall short of the level which would constitute *possession*.

a) If the person seems to be *possessed,* ministry should not be attempted, but the case referred to a priest-exorcist. It may be necessary for the leaders to take authority over any manifestation of the evil spirit **to restore the peace of the meeting**.

> In the first edition of this document I expressed the opinion that "If deprecatory prayers fail to do this, it seems defensible for leaders to use imperative formulae." Now, however, I defer to the expertise of Neal Lozano who recommends that, should manifestations occur, lay ministers should not pray binding prayers or attempt to cast out the demons – rather, they should keep speaking to the human soul being ministered to, asserting the love of Jesus, encouraging that soul to "take control of your body and mind in the name of Jesus. Open your eyes."

b) If the person seems to be afflicted in some way which falls short of possession, the law of the Church does not forbid the laity praying for deliverance. It may be more appropriate to refer the person to a priest who is authorised to make use of Appendix I of the Ordinary Form or Leo XIII's rite of "Exorcism against Satan and the fallen angels"; nevertheless, there is nothing in the discipline of the Catholic Church to prevent lay ministers from attempting acts of deliverance, providing the following norms are observed:

i. The ministers must not ask questions of the spirit(s) present. [1985 Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger #3] ***This does not, of course, preclude asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the identity of evil spirits to be delivered,* e.g. *through a word of knowledge or the gift of discernment of spirits.***

ii. Leo XIII's formula of Exorcism must not be used – so the Extraordinary Form prayer from *Exorcizo te*... through to *Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth* is expressly forbidden. [1985 Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger #2]

iii. If the gathering is *private* (which could be achieved at a publicly advertised event by taking the afflicted person aside to a room with only members of the prayer team present), prayers from Appendix II of the 1999 rite may be used. [1999 Rite of Exorcism, rubrics for Appendix II]

iv. Sacramentals blessed and exorcised according to the Extraordinary Form may be used without restriction, with a possible caveat on the use of oil. [See discussion of the probable implications of *Summorum Pontificum,* above.]

v. Prayers for deliverance should not be administered during a liturgical service. (But again, this does not prevent leaders from taking the afflicted person out of the liturgical assembly and ministering to them in a room with only members of the prayer team present.) [This is implicit by extending Article 8 of the CDF's 2000 *Instruction on Healing* and the same document's general ethos that non-liturgical prayers should not be mixed with liturgical ceremonies.]

vi. Since deliverance is a form of healing ministry, the general principles of the CDF's 2000 *Instruction on Healing* must be followed:

- If the prayer takes place in a church or sacred place, it is preferable that the overall event be led by an ordained minister (this does not exclude lay ministers from playing their proper part). [Article 1]
- Those with the most appropriate charisms (rather than those who happen to be the overall leaders) must carry out the ministry. [Paragraph 5]
- If the need for deliverance manifests during worship, care must be taken that the main assembly remains focussed on worship of God rather than attending to the manifestation. [Paragraph 5]
- All forms of hysteria must be avoided. [Article 5§3]
- The ministry must not be broadcast (on television, as a podcast, or in any other way) without specific permission from the Bishop. [Article 6]
- Any norms issued by the local bishop must be respected. [Article 5§1]

An abridged version of the norms above is available for printing as a folded A4 leaflet online at: **www.garethleyshon.info/Deliverance-Q.pdf**

Sources of Pastoral Guidance

Where the formal teaching authority of the Holy See has not pronounced on a matter, the next most authoritative source of teaching comes from individual members of the Church's Hierarchy. In this regard, it is appropriate to give attention to the following:

Cardinal Suenens – Renewal and the Powers of Darkness

Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens was for many years the Vatican's liaison with Catholic Charismatic Renewal. It is noted that from 1974-1986, he drafted a series of six articles, the "Malines Documents," on different aspects of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Document IV was published in 1983 as a book, ***Renewal and the Powers of Darkness.***

In Paragraph ¶25, Suenens warns of the need for caution and sobriety in analyzing individual cases where it seems that evil spirits have been detected and dispelled. It would be foolish to turn individual cases into broad-brush prescriptions. In ¶40 and ¶41 he catalogues examples of how Pentecostals and Catholics have made unwarranted categorical assertions about 'how evil spirits ***always*** operate'. In ¶43 and ¶44 he summarises what could happen in a prayer meeting ministering deliverance, setting it out in detail to aid the understanding of those who have no personal experience of such gatherings.

Then Suenens acknowledges that those ministering deliverance take pains to deny that they are performing "exorcisms" (¶45), choosing language such as *deliverance* or *liberation.* This is intended to both avoid alarming those receiving ministry, and incurring the interest of ecclesiastical authorities who rightly regulate exorcisms. He also acknowledges that there is an ill-defined frontier (¶46) where the strict criteria for full possession are not met:

> The complexity of the very vocabulary used to designate deliverance does not help to clarify matters... this whole domain does not easily lend itself to verbal definition. How are total demoniacal possessions distinguished from partial ones, and what do such distinctions really mean? Are we dealing with an influence operating within or outside the afflicted subject? How should we define the currently used terms: infestation, obsession, oppression, temptation...?

Suenens concludes his document by calling for a careful study (¶47-¶54) of the phenomenon of deliverance, which must be open to both the wisdom of medicine and psychology, and also to the genuine possibility of demonic influence. He notes (¶56-¶60) an urgent need for the Magisterium to update its rite of Exorcism and associated teaching, with prudent advice given to ministers of deliverance. Sadly, the 1999 Rite has not provided many clearer answers, and the confusion about terminology is as present today as it was in 1983.

Bishop Julian Porteous – The Manual of Minor Exorcisms

In 2010, the Catholic Truth Society published a small book entitled ***Manual of Minor Exorcisms***. This was edited by Bishop Julian Porteous (auxiliary of Sydney) and published with the *Imprimatur* of Cardinal Pell. The book bears the clear subtitle: ***For the use of priests.*** It does not have any endorsement by the Vatican.

The introductory text of the book contains a useful summary of the different kinds of demonic activity: ***Temptation*** (pp. 8-12) can come, of course, from our own lower instincts and from the world around us (individuals and the culture at large) as well as from demons.

Bishop Porteous next describes (pp. 12-15) what he calls ***Oppression*** – however, what he describes is the kind of persistent temptation which many deliverance practitioners would call *obsession.* The kind of oppression (weariness, heaviness) defined at the start of *this* paper is more an affliction than a form of temptation, and is not explicitly treated by Bishop Porteous.

Possession is then described (pp. 15-19) in a way consistent with this current paper, followed by definitions (consistent with everything above) of Minor Exorcisms (pp. 21-23) and Major Exorcism (pp. 23-25). The Bishop acknowledges **prayers of deliverance** as a third kind of ministry between these two (pp. 25-31) and summarises the 1985 CDF document. (He refers to it as the 1984 document – others authors also do so and at some stage, that letter has clearly been published with a typographical error on the date.) The Bishop calls for prudence and caution when the laity minister deliverance in the context of prayer groups.

Bishop Porteous next addresses the regular pastoral ministry of priests, in the confessional and when called upon to anoint the sick or to bless homes. He acknowledges (pp. 31-34) that a priest may recognise the presence of a demonic affliction in some cases, and may pray against this aloud or silently, using set texts or spontaneous words. He labels all of these interventions, ***minor exorcisms.***

The remainder of the book (pages 35-80) consists of prayers for use by priests.

Page	Material	Source	Status
35	Blessing of water and salt	Pre-Vatican II Roman Ritual – translated into English	Implicitly permitted (for priestly blessing and lay use of the sacramentals) by *Summorum Pontificum.*
38	Blessing of water	1999 Rite of Exorcism	The 1999 rite does not give specific guidance about which portions might be extracted for use in other contexts; so this use is not explicitly forbidden.
39*	Litany of Saints	1999 Rite of Exorcism (Chapter I and Appendix II)	The form of the litany which explicitly concludes "deliver him/her" is permitted for lay use in private by Appendix II.
44*	Renewal of Baptismal Promises	1999 Rite of Exorcism Chapter I; also at the Easter Vigil	Already used in public liturgy.
45*	Deliverance with the sign of the Cross	Adapted from Appendix I #8 and Appendix II.	The first text is authorised whenever a priest may apply Appendix I; the second may be used freely by the laity in private.
46*	Prayers of Minor Exorcism	Adapted from RCIA texts for catechumens.	Such use is not foreseen by the RCIA but not explicitly forbidden.

47	Deprecative form of Exorcism	1999 Rite Chapter II, #81	This text, from the "additional texts *ad lib*" might replace the slightly shorter version at Appendix I #9 and could be used whenever a priest may apply Appendix I.
49	Imperative form of Exorcism – not to be used without prior use of the deprecative.	1999 Rite Chapter I, #62	The chosen text is excerpted from the Rite of Major Exorcism. Other imperative forms are available at Appendix I #10 and in Chapter II (*ad lib* use) #82 & #84. It is not clear on what authority the Bishop has excerpted the text from the Rite of Major Exorcism itself for use in other contexts.
50*	A Simple Imperative Formula	Example probably composed by Bishop Porteous	No document above forbids *commanding* demons; only mandated exorcists may question them (1985 CDF letter).
50	Prayer of Pope Leo XIII	The full text (in English) of *Exorcismus in Satanam et Angelos Apostaticos* from the pre-Vatican-II Roman Ritual	Bishop Porteous states that this "can be used by priests" but does not specify that the rubric in the Roman Ritual says that the priest must have permission from his Ordinary.
55*	Prayers from various sources	Identified in the book, where known.	These prayers have no special restrictions and need no ecclesial authorisation.
67	Blessing of a Home	Current Book of Blessings (modified)	The modifications are those within the normal tailoring of the Prayer of the Faithful.
70	Blessing of a Home	Pre-Vatican II Roman Ritual – translated into English	Implicitly permitted by *Summorum Pontificum.*
72*	Prayers from various sources	Identified in the book, where known.	These prayers have no special restrictions and need no ecclesial authorisation.

Some of the prayers offered above fall in grey areas – the adaption of the RCIA Minor Exorcisms, the omission of the need for the priest's Ordinary to permit use of the Leo XIII prayer, and the general ambiguity about when material from Appendix I of the 1999 Rite may be used.

The most surprising inclusion is the imperative formula excerpted directly from the 1999 Rite of Major Exorcism – never to be used without the deprecative – with a note (Bishop Porteous's pastoral judgment) that in cases of necessity, priests who have not been mandated to carry out the full rite of exorcism may need to use these prayers. This has Cardinal Pell's *Imprimatur*.

What may deacons and laypersons use from this book? The existence of permanent deacons was not contemplated when rubrics were composed for the Extraordinary Form; arguably they may bless the various sacramentals. The materials on pages marked by an asterisk (*) above are partly or wholly suitable for lay use.

Revd Gabriele Amorth – An Exorcist: More Stories

Revd Amorth has served as Chief Exorcist of the Diocese of Rome, a role which does not give him authority in the teaching Magisterium, but identifies him as a trusted and wise figure in matters of exorcism. He has published two books: *An Exorcist Tells His Story* and *An Exorcist: More Stories*. The latter includes a brief discussion of Deliverance Ministry at pages 91-107, a chapter entitled *Exorcism and Prayers of Liberation.*

Amorth strongly prefers (pp. 91-92) a use of language in which the word 'exorcism' is reserved for the (major) exorcism of the possessed, and any other form of ministry is called 'deliverance'. He is not in favour of calling deliverance 'simple exorcism'.

Amorth acknowledges that the baptised faithful have a God-given potential to minister deliverance and notes that personal faith can be a more significant factor that the authority wielded by a mandated exorcist, in making a prayer of deliverance efficacious. On the other hand, the mere presence of members of the faithful motivated by curiosity can seriously impede the ministry (pp. 92-99).

When laypersons assist an exorcist in the performance of the formal Rite of Exorcism, they should assist only by quiet prayers, and must not usurp the authority of the priest by laying on hands or directing the prayer in any way; this is not foreseen by the Rite (p. 98).

When prayer groups and ministry teams offer prayers for deliverance, they should do so in a sober and restrained way. It is not fitting for persons other than the leader to lay hands on the one receiving ministry, though hands may be extended towards that person by other team members. If the recipient manifests violently, it may be necessary for trusted persons (ideally, family members) to restrain the person and/or to move the ministry to a more private room. Anything which arouses curiosity among passive spectators, or even prayer team members, is not helpful (pp. 96-97).

ICCRS Guidelines on Healing

ICCRS is the international body which liaises between charismatic Catholics and the Holy See. It is not part of the Magisterium and claims no authority to direct the actions of charismatic Catholics. Any guidelines it offers are given in a spirit of service. In 2007, it published a set of *Guidelines on Prayers for Healing* which bears the endorsement of Cardinal Rylko as President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

The document acknowledges (p. 33, page references are to the English 2nd edition) that tackling those afflicted by evil spirits is one aspect of the charismatic healing ministry, but does not propose to offer specific guidance on deliverance, because this needs its own specialist consideration (p. 38). The general guidelines on prayers for healing (pp. 42-50) should be applied to deliverance insofar as they are applicable.

Useful points which can be specifically applied in deliverance ministry:

- When deliverance does not take place, the afflicted person must not be accused of "lacking faith for healing". (ICCRS p. 44)
- Apparent healings may be greeted with joyful praise but prudent caution should be exercised about making public claims of specific healings. (ICCRS p. 45)
- Prayer ministry should not be offered in isolation, but where the recipient can receive aftercare and – if not already a believer – encouragement to accept the Gospel. (ICCRS pp. 45-46)
- Ministry leaders who seem to have particular charisms of deliverance or discernment of spirits should not be unduly exalted. (ICCRS p. 46)

About the Author



Revd Dr Gareth Leyshon was ordained priest for the Archdiocese of Cardiff in May 2007.

Prior to my ordination, I studied physics at the University of Oxford, and completed a doctoral thesis on dust in distant galaxies at the University of Wales, Cardiff. At seminary, I obtained a First Class degree in Theology from the University of Surrey. Also during my time at seminary, I wrote a paper exploring the Catholic perspective on the New Age Movement. A copy was submitted to the Vatican, and well-received by the relevant department, in response to the publication of ***Jesus Christ, Bearer of the Water of Life. (~~LT~~ IT SP)***

For the record, I am not, and have never been, an appointed exorcist. In the course of my ministry as a parish priest I have dealt with a handful of cases where families wanted their home blessed because they believed some evil influence was present. In one of those cases, it seemed to me that a deeper ministry was required, but the adolescent boy at the centre of the situation was unwilling to be helped, so I could take matters no further.

Because I have studied exorcism and deliverance from an academic perspective, I am occasionally asked by the media office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to take part in media interviews clarifying the role of exorcism in Catholic practice.

In September 2013, I was appointed parish priest of St Philip Evans parish in Cardiff; the pastoral needs of this parish, together with my roles as Chair of the Diocesan Evangelisation Group, and Director of Adult Religious Education, constitute my full-time ministry.